

A Box Called “HOPE”

A story about Sherry Carrion, Certified Nursing Associate student

If ever you need a boost, if you ever need help looking at the bright side of life, if you ever simply want to have a pleasant conversation, talk to Sherry Carrion. She's a brand new CNA (Certified Nursing Associate) and one of the most positive, energetic people in Southeastern, Wisconsin. Sherry finds the silver lining in most any situation.



“COVID for me,” Sherry says, “was an opportunity to reassess, ‘What am I doing? Where am I going?’ And HOPE reassured me, ‘Yes, Sherry, you are making the right decision.’”

The 56 year old Racine native attended Gateway for Food Service

Management, graduating in 1987. For many years she was a cook at the Racine County Jail, taking tremendous pride in preparing good food and treating the inmates with dignity and respect. Pre-COVID Sherry was a cook in an assisted living facility. It was during that time that Sherry's dad, living in a different assisted living facility, complained of neglect and unsatisfactory conditions.

“When my dad died in July of 2019, I made a vow that I was going to take care of someone's loved one the way I wanted my father to be taken care of.” At the time, she didn't know how that could possibly happen since she was in food service and didn't have the means to go back to school.

As the impacts of the pandemic set in, Sherry questioned the stability of her career. “With

everything being shut down I knew being in foodservice wasn't gonna work for me anymore.”

In June of 2020, she found a part time job at Stowell. Stowell is a home health care provider in Racine, and Sherry landed a job as a caregiver. She loved the work and felt she was fulfilling her vow, but between the part time hours and low wages, she says she prayed for something more.

According to Sherry, the answer to her prayers came by way of an email from the office manager at Stowell, introducing the SC Johnson HOPE Program and inviting Stowell caregivers to consider the opportunity to become CNAs through Gateway. Sherry says, “I thought, ‘You know what Sherry, you don't want to pass up this opportunity. This is an opportunity for you to reaffirm why you're doing what you're doing.’ So I signed up for the HOPE Program.”

Not quite sure how she would handle going back to school, Sherry says she dove in. “I didn't think I could be disciplined enough. I had a divorce Netflix. I found a new partner in crime -- studying! At first I was scared but then I thought, ‘You know what? This is fun. My brain is awake now. I'm awake! I'm alive! I feel good! I'm doing something good!’”

“When I made that commitment to my dad and COVID hit, HOPE opened the door.”

Sherry says she doubts she would ever have gone back to school if it weren't for the HOPE program, “I didn't have the courage and sure the heck didn't have the money.” This is all part of God's plan I'm telling you. When I made that commitment to my dad and COVID hit, HOPE opened the door.”

Sherry says receiving a HOPE scholarship is like receiving a beautifully wrapped present. "In that box was the gift of hope, the gift of a great teacher in Sarah the nurse. I keep unpacking all these things: Wow the gift of courage! Wow the gift of confidence! It built my self esteem, my self worth... I can't even explain. I'm overjoyed. I'm beyond grateful. It's all in this box labeled HOPE."

"I am a CNA. Who woulda thought?"

Sherry struggles to find the right words to convey her thanks. "Thank you for giving me the box of opportunities. Thank you. That sounds so simple, but

it's coming from my heart. I am so grateful. SC Johnson has made a difference, has made a difference in Racine Wisconsin! And I am grateful to be part of making a difference."

Her energy is contagious. Her enthusiasm is unbridled. Her future is now in her hands. "I am a CNA! Who woulda thought? There are so many opportunities now."

With tears in her eyes, Sherry says, "This is my calling. At 56 years old I found what I've been searching and searching and searching for. I can care about someone from my heart." And then Sherry adds, "And I also bring 30 years of food service, so I can make them a phenomenal lunch. And who doesn't like to be fed a phenomenal lunch?"